

# A Roadmap to Afterschool for All

By Jennifer Rinehart

**D**uring the past 20 years, afterschool programs have become an increasingly vital part of most American communities. Today, some 6.5 million children across the nation participate in these programs. Another 15 million children would participate if a program were available to them, according to their parents.

These numbers tell us at least two important things: First, parents recognize that afterschool programs work, and they want their kids involved in them. Second, many more children lack access to afterschool than have it.

The good news is that we've found a model that works and that enjoys widespread public support. The bad news is that we've got a long way to go in meeting public demand for afterschool opportunities.

Getting from here to there is a challenge sufficiently daunting that the Afterschool Alliance recently took on the task of constructing a *Roadmap to Afterschool for*

*All*. This new report ([www.afterschoolalliance.org](http://www.afterschoolalliance.org)) examines how afterschool programs are funded now, and how they ought to be funded if we are to achieve the goal of providing afterschool to all who need it.

## Why Afterschool Matters

Afterschool programs are wildly popular. In election-eve polling last November, 9 in 10 voters said that afterschool programs are important, and 3 in 4 described afterschool programming as an "absolute necessity" in their communities. Such numbers help explain why repeated efforts by the previous administration to cut federal funding for afterschool programs failed, and why federal funding has begun to creep upward in the past two years.

Reams of research demonstrate that quality afterschool programs keep kids safe, inspire them to learn, and help working families. Afterschool programs:



- Provide children with a safe place to go in the critical afterschool hours, a time when they might otherwise be engaged in a variety of unhealthy behaviors.
- Provide tutoring, reinforcement, and enrichment activities that help children succeed academically.
- Relieve working parents' worries about what their children are up to every weekday afternoon.
- Give children opportunities to see new worlds, put school lessons into practice, discover their talents and explore career paths, and help them develop the academic, social, and professional skills they need to succeed in an increasingly competitive global economy.

## Where the Path Begins

Despite all we know about the academic, social, and behavioral benefits of afterschool programs, and despite their manifest popularity, most children are missing out. As a result, on any given day, more than 14 million children and youth are on their own after school—more than twice the 6.5 million children who are in afterschool programs.

The simple reason is money. Current funding levels are nowhere near what they would need to be to provide afterschool programs to all children who need them. While funding for the federal government's principal funding stream for afterschool programs, the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative, has grown modestly in the past two years to \$1.1 billion, it does not yet approach the \$2.5 billion authorized in the No Child Left Behind Act. Even if it did, millions of children would still be without afterschool programs because even the No Child Left Behind levels are insufficient to meet the real need.

Until now, the discussion about afterschool funding has been proscribed by the short-term politics of education spending: How much is Congress willing to appropriate in any given year? The *Roadmap to Afterschool for All* asks and answers the more critical long-term question: What do we need to get the job done?

Led by researchers at the Harvard School of Public Health, the *Roadmap* assesses for the first time the nation's current investment in afterschool programs from the public sector, parents, foundations, and businesses, and estimates the additional investment needed from each sector to provide quality afterschool programs for all children.

Researchers began by identifying 50 randomly selected school districts, then chose staff from afterschool programs—again randomly—from within those districts for in-depth interviews. In total, they completed interviews for 537 programs using a detailed questionnaire designed to obtain basic descriptive information about programming offered and children served, as well as funding information from all sources (federal, state, local, philanthropy, private, tuition, in-kind). Data were

collected in the fall of 2007 and spring of 2008 and were based on the 2006–2007 school year.

## The Research Revealed

- Parents are now paying the lion's share of afterschool costs, about 76% on average. Even in low-income communities, parents are paying 54% of the tab.
- Funding of all types is insufficient. Nearly one-third (32%) of programs reported that their expenses exceeded their revenues.
- On average, the cost per child is \$3,190. Parents in low-income areas are paying an average of \$1,722 per year.
- The federal government is paying about \$2.3 billion of the nation's afterschool costs, representing just 11% of the total. By contrast, 29% of children in programs qualify for federal assistance.
- A number of states are making significant contributions to afterschool programs, most notably California, which contributed \$550 million to afterschool programs in that state. A handful of other states provided more than \$10 million for afterschool programs, including Rhode Island, New York, Georgia, New Jersey, Tennessee, and Ohio. A number of other states are making smaller contributions. But many contribute nothing. In all, according to this research, states are contributing about 3% of total afterschool costs.
- A number of cities are making significant contributions, including New York City; Palm Beach, Florida; Providence, Rhode Island; and Baltimore, Maryland. The total contribution from cities, counties, school districts, and other local jurisdictions is about 2.4% of total costs.
- Businesses are making important contributions as well. A 2005 study by Corporate Voices found that American businesses had invested more than \$136 million in local afterschool programs in 2005. That said, our research found that the annual contribution to afterschool programs by the business community is less than 1% of total costs.
- Charitable foundations are another important source, providing 2.5% of total costs. Individual donors provide almost 2% of annual costs.

The number that stands out, of course, is the 76% contributed by parents, not just because it's a strikingly high share of overall costs, but because if and when we scale up afterschool programs to the point that they are available to all children who need them, that percentage is almost certainly unsustainable. Many parents are already unable to pay fees to enroll their children in afterschool programs. Given the nation's current economic difficulties, we simply cannot expect parents to continue to bear so much of the economic burden for afterschool programs.

The *Roadmap to Afterschool for All* acknowledges that and other challenges by

- Accounting for the economic reality that some parents are unable to afford fees, while others can.
- Recognizing the important role of multiple funding sources—governments at all levels, philanthropic support, businesses, and parent fees.
- Accounting for a broad range of programs from a variety of sponsors, reflecting the rich diversity of American communities.
- Focusing on approaches that sustain successful quality programs, while allowing innovative new programs to develop.

Another significant lesson from the *Roadmap* research: Previous studies revealed that cost is a principal factor in parents' decision about an afterschool program, second only to whether or not the child enjoys the program. The *Roadmap* adds a new insight: Long-standing afterschool programs are more likely to charge parent fees and less likely to serve low-income children. Combined, these data tell us that the nation's current system of afterschool programs is structured to serve those who can afford to pay, while leaving those who cannot with few, if any, options to help keep their kids safe and give them opportunities to learn after the school day ends.

### A Journey Taken in Partnership

The *Roadmap to Afterschool for All* recommends a well-orchestrated partnership across sectors, reflecting a societal commitment to ensuring that all kids have access to quality afterschool programs. The foundation of the *Roadmap* is the nation's and, in particular, the federal government's commitment to ensuring that all children have access to a quality education. Making that commitment meaningful involves providing afterschool opportunities to all.

## To ensure all children have access to quality, affordable afterschool programs, we will need added investment from all stakeholders.

The *Roadmap* focuses the federal investment on ensuring that the 5.6 million low-income children who need quality afterschool programs have access to them. It calls for an annual federal investment—across several funding streams—of just under \$18 billion. Such an investment would reduce the burden on low-income families while helping provide those 5.6 million low-income youth with academic enrichment, healthy



snacks and in some cases even dinner, and a safe environment in the hours after school.

With the exception of parents' already prodigious contribution, the *Roadmap to Afterschool for All* maintains other sectors' current investment levels, increasing them by the same percentage as the federal share (nearly eight times the current investment).

To be clear, however, it says the federal government must lead the way—and that it can do so by beginning to ramp up its investment with the FY2010 federal appropriations process now in progress. Significant increases to funding for 21st Century Community Learning Centers and the Child Care Development Block Grant program will go a long way toward helping families quickly, while representing an important down payment on the significant long-term increase in federal funding that is so desperately needed.

### Added Investment

To ensure all children have access to quality, affordable afterschool programs, we will need added investment from all stakeholders. Even if the *Roadmap to Afterschool for All* is followed, families will continue to carry a large share of afterschool costs. What will change is that the federal government will do much more to ensure that children whose families cannot afford quality afterschool programs will still have access to them.

State and local governments, as well as private funders including philanthropies and business and religious organizations, can help meet the needs of families living near poverty levels, and families that can afford to pay for afterschool care will continue to do so.

If we are to truly make quality, affordable afterschool programs available to all children who need them, we must have increased investment from all sectors. Such spending won't be easy, but it's desperately needed. If we fail to put the afternoon hours to good use by giving every child safe, adult-supervised, enriching activities, we will lose a real opportunity to give children a brighter future, strengthen families, and improve our economy. Now more than ever, we need to increase the investment in quality afterschool programs from all sectors.

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